

# The Builder.

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**A** MILLION of people, on a moderate calculation, derive the basis and medium of most of their fluid sustenance and culinary processes—their *pabulum vite*—water, from the Thames, into which the whole of the sluggish and imperfect drainage and corruption of the metropolis is disembogued. Two millions of people, at the lowest calculation, breathe continually the air of streets and houses, the whole substratum of which is saturated with the abomination of cesspools and stagnant sewers, whose steaming vapours and gases are continually impregnating the air so breathed. These are facts no less horrible and astounding, than disgraceful to the boasted refinement, energy, and wealth of the metropolis of the British empire. True, the exertions of some are never-ceasing; but if the senses of the mass of the community were not blunted by habit, so as to be utterly unconcerned of the evils, in the midst of which they vegetate, or stagnate rather, it could never have remained for any, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, to taunt them with the existence or the endurance of such evils. It is full time that the matter should be taken properly in hand, and that, by one spirited and comprehensive effort, all traces of uncleanness should be swept away. The most serious complaints are indeed continually made to those whose duty it has hitherto been to remove the source of mischief, but whose practices has been, perhaps unavoidably, merely to dally with it, stir it up, and intensify our consciousness of it. Even palliation is put off by the perpetual assurance that “there can be no relief previous to the execution of the comprehensive drainage plan, which is in contemplation.” What we now want is immediate action, not mere dallying “contemplation.” Something must be done. The Thames must be purified, and the air must be made wholesome.

If we may judge from the proceedings at recent meetings, the Commissioners of Sewers have no intention of attempting this, at all events at present. They are reducing the establishment and appear to be setting their house in order for quietly carrying on the present business;—even countermanding some of the isolated works which had been ordered, amounting in cost to 41,000*l*. It was on the 10th instant that Mr. Lawes, the chairman, brought forward the scheme for the reduction of the establishment, and which the Court at once unanimously adopted.

It will be observed, by the way, that, under the present arrangements, nothing is brought forward before the Court for discussion: this we suppose passes elsewhere: it simply comes there for formal acceptance.\*

\* One exception occurred on the 17th inst., when the motion, “that the services of Mr. John Phillips, as surveyor, be discontinued,” was carried by one only. Remembering the good service performed by Mr. Phillips at an earlier period, the public will probably ask the reason for his dismissal. We were glad to observe that Mr. Alison, who was a member of the old Westminster Commission, moved a proposition to retain Mr. Phillips.

On the occasion to which we have alluded, Mr. Lawes stated that the opinion both in Parliament and out of doors being, that the expenditure was greater than the necessities of the case, or the amount of works executed, would justify, he had obtained returns of the charges at different periods. He found that on the 30th of November, 1847, the establishment charges amounted to 12,838*l*. 5*s*. 9*d*. On the 5th of January, 1849, they amounted to 16,778*l*. On the 8th of October, 1849, they had increased to 22,820*l*.; and on the 1st of August, 1851, the same charges amounted to 24,753*l*. 15*s*. 8*d*. Upon a reference to the amount of public works executed during the several years to which that return related, he found that in 1847 they amounted to 70,630*l*. 4*s*. 7*d*.; in 1848, to 79,665*l*. 9*s*. 7*d*., of which sum 39,173*l*. 19*s*. 5*d*. was in respect of works executed or put in hand prior to November, 1847; in 1849, the works executed amounted to 80,300*l*. 4*s*. 1*d*.; and in 1850, to 57,655*l*. 6*s*. 4*d*. It would then at once be seen by comparing these sums with the amounts expended in establishment charges that they bore a very large proportion indeed to the extent of public works executed by the commission. By the scheme submitted he showed that, including some reductions lately made, a gross annual saving of 9,027*l*. would be effected in the establishment charges, now estimated at 29,064*l*. *£*

Founded on the pressing want, a Company to drain London has been set on foot, and the necessary steps have been taken preparatory to applying to Parliament for the purpose of securing an Act of Incorporation during the forthcoming session. The Bill, it appears, has been submitted to the Government, with the view to obtain their sanction to the introduction of a clause which will, in consideration of the public benefits to be attained, guarantee a minimum rate of 3 per cent. interest to the shareholders in the enterprise. The estimates, however, give assurance, it is said, that the works may be constructed without subjecting the ratepayers to any charge whatever.

The plan (not a new one) of this company is described as consisting of—

“A tunnel-sewer on each side of the Thames, crossing under the present sewers without disturbing them, and receiving the contents of each through a shaft. These two tunnel-sewers will be constructed by tunnelling or boring, and will be laid with such an additional fall, or inclination, as will secure a rapid subterranean current towards the marshes east of the metropolis, where the refuse-matter will be raised by mechanical means, for agricultural purposes. The company's works will afford means for effectually draining the lowest parts of the metropolis: an important sanitary improvement will be conferred, by the proposed removal of the refuse which now vitiates the atmosphere: the Thames water, which is used by a million of the inhabitants, will be preserved from pollution; and a guano field, of vast extent, will be collected for the use of our agriculturists.”

They naturally quote the declaration of a Select Committee of the House of Commons, on July 13, 1846:—“That it is only through the agency of a company,” that the various plans proposed to them “may be all combined and applied to the important purposes of cleansing our towns, purifying our rivers, and enriching our soil.” “Commercial enterprise,” says Mr. Morewood, the projector of this company, in a communication to us on the subject, “can point to works which it has devised, successfully carried, and managed, although involving an expenditure of several hundred

millions sterling. It has accomplished works previously esteemed impossible. We can also organise an Exhibition, passing like a meteor along the horizon. . . . Fifty-six years ago it was felt that a dock was wanted for ships. The subject was fully laid before a general meeting, and in December, 1795, the project proposed was unanimously approved of, and a subscription of 800,000*l*. was filled in a few hours for carrying the same into effect. In 1851, redundant capital is seeking employment in every part of the globe. Who then, will now join in the honour of prosecuting and securing to the metropolis a work, which in its beneficial results will not stand second to any other work which man has accomplished?” There are few things that commercial enterprise cannot accomplish, but to enlist it there must of course be a reasonable prospect of gain. We have always viewed favourably the endeavours made to apply the proceeds of the sewers to agricultural purposes; and are most anxious to see brought into practice what ought to be so profitable. Certainty, however, on this head has not increased; the difficulty of application has not lessened; and whether the prospect of remuneration which the scheme affords be sufficient to bring in the capital required to effect the complete and perfect drainage of London remains to be seen. If it were otherwise, however, we are not anxious to confide this important matter to a commercial company. The first and paramount object is the effectual drainage of the metropolis, not to make money by it, and this must be done by the public, irrespective of cost and returns.

Mr. Lewis Gordon, the engineer, has recently published a description of Captain Vetch's plan for the sewerage of the metropolis, by which it was proposed, it will be remembered, as in some other plans, to gather up the sewage on each side of the Thames, to establish settling tanks near Plaistow Level, and at Deptford, and to take the overflow into the river at a short distance west of Barking Creek. “There is no room,” says Captain Vetch, “for half measures: it is in vain to hope that the sewerage of the town can be materially improved until the river is freed from the pollution at present discharged into it.” We may mention that the Captain's views on Water Supply are added: the two subjects are intimately connected, and ought always to be considered together.

At Croydon, last week, new combined works of water supply and drainage were opened. The supply of water is derived directly from a spring, which has been found adequate for the supply of the whole town, with only the intervention of a covered reservoir 75 feet in diameter, to adjust the twenty-four hours' flow of the spring to the twelve or fourteen hours' consumption, this arrangement obviating the exposure of the water to pollution, and its deterioration from stagnation. The works, we understand, were designed by Mr. W. Ranger, and are especially noticeable as the first constructed under the Public Health Act. At a meeting there on the occasion, it was stated that—

The expense of the water supply in the metropolis, taking as examples three average London parishes supplied by trading companies, was 3*l*. per annum per house, one with another, or about 1*s*. 2*d*. per week, for an intermittent supply, besides the expense and

\* A short Description of the Plans of Captain Vetch for the Sewerage of the Metropolis. London: Widd, 1851. Various maps accompany it.